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Founding Member of Abu Sayyaf Group Sentenced To 23 Years in Prison For 1995 Hostage Taking Involving U.S. and Philippine Citizens

WASHINGTON - Madhatta Asagal Haipe, a citizen of the Philippines and founding member of Al-Harakat Al-Islamiyyah, also known as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), was sentenced today to 23 years in prison after earlier pleading guilty to four counts of hostage taking in the 1995 abduction of 16 people, including four U.S. citizens, in the Philippines.

The sentence was announced by David Kris, Assistant Attorney General for National Security; Ronald C. Machen Jr., U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia; and Daphne Hearn, Interim Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Honolulu Field Office.

Haipe, 48, was extradited to the United States from the Philippines in 2009 to face the charges in this case. He pleaded guilty in July 2010, and was sentenced today by the Honorable Judge Richard W. Roberts in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

According to the factual proffer in support of the guilty plea, to which Haipe previously agreed in court, Haipe was the General Secretary of the ASG, or second-in-command, under the Amir, at the time of the hostage taking. The Amir of the ASG had directed that members of the group engage in kidnappings for ransom in order to raise funds for the group and to raise the public's awareness of the group's purpose. The ASG was subsequently designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. Secretary of State, and remains so designated today.

As admitted by Haipe as part of his guilty plea, on December 27, 1995, several armed members of the ASG kidnapped 16 individuals, including four U.S. citizens, one U.S. permanent resident alien, and 11 Philippine citizens, in the rugged area around Trankini Falls, near Lake Sebu, in southern Mindanao, in the Philippines. The hostages, including six children, were forced to march up a mountainside. Some of the adults had rope tied around their hands or neck.

Haipе informed the hostages that they were being kidnapped for ransom, and he individually questioned some of them to determine their nationality and the amount of ransom to be demanded. Later that same day, Haipе decided to release four of the 16 hostages to allow them to collect a ransom totaling at least one million Filipino pesos (equivalent to about \$38,000 U.S. dollars, at the time). He threatened that if the released hostages told anyone about the kidnapping, those remaining in captivity would be killed.

Haipе and his group then forced the remaining hostages to continue marching up the mountainside to evade capture by the Philippine authorities. Four days later, on December 31, 1995, Haipе and his group released the remaining hostages after a ransom was paid.

Many of the victims of this crime came to Washington for today's sentencing.

Haipе was indicted for this crime by a federal grand jury in Washington, D.C. in November 2000. The Department of Justice and the FBI, working with their partners in the Philippines, have vigorously pursued this case for years.

"I applaud the FBI agents, Justice Department prosecutors and authorities in the Philippines who relentlessly pursued this matter on behalf of the victims, who were held hostage and threatened with death by this Abu Sayyaf leader. With today's sentence, Mr. Haipе is finally being held accountable for his actions," said Assistant Attorney General for National Security Kris.

"Fifteen years ago in the southern Philippines, Abu Sayyaf's second-in-command threatened the lives of sixteen innocent men, women, and children," said U.S. Attorney Machen. "It was incredibly gratifying that so many of those victims were able to stand today in an American courtroom and watch the terrorist who held them hostage be sent to prison for his crimes."

"For 15 years, the Honolulu Division of the FBI worked closely with Philippine authorities to bring this defendant to justice," said Interim Special Agent in Charge Daphne Hearn of the FBI in Honolulu. "This case can be seen as a model of international law enforcement coordination between friendly nations."

The investigation was conducted by the FBI's Honolulu Field Office, led for the past several years by Special Agent A. Ripley McGuinn, with substantial assistance from the Philippines Department of Justice, the Philippine National Police, the National Bureau of Investigation, the Anti-Money Laundering Council and the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs. The Criminal Division's Office of International Affairs and, in particular, Robert Courtney, the U.S. Justice Department's Attaché to the Philippines, also provided substantial assistance in this case.

The prosecution was handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Gregg Maisel and Anthony Asuncion of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, as well as Trial Attorney T.J. Reardon, III, of the Counterterrorism Section of the Justice Department's National Security Division.